

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 22, 2018

VIA ELECTRONIC DELIVERY

Loren Sweatt
Acting Assistant Secretary of Labor for Occupational Safety and Health
Occupational Safety and Health Administration
200 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, DC 20210

Dear Ms. Sweatt,

We urge you to propose a new, more protective permissible exposure limit (PEL) for ethylene oxide (EtO). In your assessment, we request you consider if alternatives to EtO for sterilization exists and ensure that workers exposed to EtO have monitoring devices able to detect concentrations deemed unsafe for humans. We are concerned that new exposure thresholds will be lower than the detection limit of many inexpensive monitors, which will render the new standard useless. Facilities who use EtO must be required to have monitors that have detection limits that are able to meet OSHA's updated PEL.

As you know, EtO was characterized as a known carcinogen two years ago yet public health standards meant to protect workers exposed to EtO at sterilization facilities, and the communities surrounding them, have not been updated. In June of 2018 the Agency for Toxic Disease Registry (ATSDR), an arm of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), published a report indicating that Willowbrook, Illinois, which harbors a facility that uses EtO for sterilizing hospital equipment, had an increased cancer risk. We have requested the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) take several steps to ensure the public health of the community there is safeguarded.

We recognize that the workers at facilities who use EtO also require increased protections. The report published by ATSDR indicated that workers in sterilization facilities have an increased risk for breast cancer and lymphohematopoietic cancers. We are concerned that in addition to cancer, workers at these facilities could be vulnerable to other health impacts.

There are approximately 10 facilities across the Country that use EtO to sterilize hospital equipment. This equipment is used every day in every corner of the world to save people's lives; it would be cruel irony if the workers enabling us with the tools we need to cure diseases and fix ailments were doing so at the expense of their own health.
Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



TAMMY DUCKWORTH
United States Senator



RICHARD J. DURBIN
United States Senator